

[I was born in Austin, Texas]

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Words 2205 [?]

APR 11 1938 PIONEER STORY

I was born in Austin Texas, in 1874, and lived there until I was twelve years old, I have lived in the state of New Mexico, for fifty one years, and in Lincoln County thirty three years.

My father, W. M. Watson, my mother, one sister, two brothers and myself, left Austin Texas, in October 1886 in an immigrant train consisting of seven covered wagons. Each wagon was drawn by four horses. There was the Johnson family, father, mother and six children, the Reeves family, father, mother and eight children.

One wagon hauled nothing but provisions, the other six wagons were for the families and their clothing and bedding. Each family had their own chuck box on the back of their wagon and each family did their own cooking. Mother and I did the cooking for our family. I was the oldest girl and Mother was in very poor health which is the reason that we left Texas. Father had owned a farm on the Colorado river just below Austin, where we raised chickens, ducks, geese, hogs, cattle and some horses. We raised all kind of feed for our stock and lots of garden stuff. Before we sold out the farm to come west we canned a lot of stuff from our garden, cured up a lot of hog meat and made lots of candles out of beef tallow and cotton string for our trip to the west. Mother had her own candle moulds and brought them with her. We ground our own corn meal before leaving the farm so we had enough provisions to do us until we reached Silver City New Mexico, so we tho'ught. On

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the trip we made sour dough biscuits and corn pones and baked them in Dutch ovens. We had a cow hide stretched underneath our wagon to carry the cooking utensils in as they were too black to go inside the wagon. We used 2 wood to cook with until we reached the staked plains in west Texas and then we had to use Buffalo and cow chips as there was no wood on the plains. What a happy bunch we were. The first night we camped out somewhere between Austin and Llano Texas, on some river, I can't remember the name of it. The trip was such a lark for we children until we reached the staked plains, and there the coyotes and wolves would howl at night and scare we kids nearly to death. The men folks hunted for antelope and deer all the way along and that was the only fresh meat we had until we got to Pecos [?] Texas. All the children in the crows were so afraid of the Indians for we had heard the older folks tell about the horrible things the Indians did to the white people coming to the west. We would be riding along and would see the tall daggers in the distance and we just knew it was a band of Indians waiting to attack us when we got near enough. I wanted to see a body of water so bad while crossing the plains that when I saw my first mirage I just knew that we were coming to a lake of water soon, but we never got to the lake. I was raised on the Colorado river in Texas and had always been used to lots of water. One day while traveling on the plains we ran short of water for drinking and cooking. We had to travel late into the night until we came to some lakes northwest of San Angelo Texas. We struck the Concho river just below San Angelo Texas and camped in a big pecan grove on the river. We camped there for several days and gathered pecans. While traveling across the plains we always tried to make it from one camp ground to another. One night we were late making the camp ground and by the time we had our suppers and fixed the horses for the night it was dark. We all went to bed and were just about asleep when we heard the coyotes and wolves howling and snarling some distance from our camp and they kept it up all 3 night. We could not make out what they were after for we knew that they were not after our horses. Early the next morning father got up and walked out in the direction from where we had heard the wolves and coyotes and found that they had been digging in a new made grave. He called to the other men to come and help him fill in the grave as the wolves and coyotes had dug down to the

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coffin. The coffin had been made of pine boxes and what small pieces of wood they had had with them. There was a small board with the name "Lillie Walker Age 16 years" which they put at the head, of the grave. We left the camp on our way and overtook an immigrant train and we all camped together the next night and they told us about Lillie walker taking sick and dying on the plains and that her father and mother were in the immigrant train and how broken hearted they were because they had to leave their child all alone out on the plains. She had died one night and they had to bury her the next morning as they were short of water for their stock and had to keep on their way. This made a deep impression on me and I have never forgotten it. I was so sorry for the girl's father and mother. We traveled with these people until we got to Pecos Texas and they went on to White Oaks New Mexico to the gold fields. It took us about two mouths to make the trip from Austin to Pecos Texas. We had traveled slow and when we came to a nice place where there was nice grass for our horses and wood and water we would lay over several days to let the horses rest and the families wash.

I shall never forget when we first came in sight of the Pecos River. We were so glad to see so much water but when we reached the river it was way up and such dirty red water. We had to dip it up in buckets and barrels and let it settle before we could use it. We crossed the river on the Texas and Pacific Railroad bridge between Pecos and Barstow Texas. When we got to Pecos Mother was feeling so bad we had to 4 lay over there until she was able to travel again. The rest of our party went on into Lincoln County New Mexico. We never heard from them after they left us. Mother was so bad while we were in Pecos that I had to take all the responsibility of the family and raised the two smaller children, for my Mother died in the fall of 1887.

While we were living in Pecos waiting for Mother to get strong enough for us to travel, Father worked for the Texas and Pacific Railroad Company. We four children dug mesquite roots and sold them for fire wood and also traded them to an old Dutchman for vegetables. About the time we were ready to leave Pecos Texas for Silver City New Mexico there was a family by the name of Henderson living in Pecos. One of their small

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boys picked up a silk handkerchief along the railroad track and took it home to his Mother. In a few days the whole family took down with smallpox. The mother and six children died, leaving the father and one four year old boy. The people of Pecos had rushed to the Henderson family when they first became ill and before they knew what was the matter with them, and every one that went to the Henderson home took smallpox and lots of them died. Our being new comers and not knowing very many people is all that saved us from having this dreadful disease. They traced the source of the disease back to the silk handkerchief which was supposed to have been thro'wn from a passenger train as there was no smallpox at Pecos at that time.

Another sad thing happened at Pecos while we were there that impressed me. I have forgotten the name of the family. The husband was the foremen of a big cattle company that had several cattle ranches near Pecos. He had to go to Pecos each month to get the money to pay off the ranch hands. This particular time he had quite a sum of money. When he got home he put the money under the head of his bed as he was 5 not to pay off until the next day. He always kept a loaded six shooter at the head of the bed. Late in the evening he came to his wife he had to go to one of the other ranchers and that he would not be back that night. He told her to be sure and lock the house up good and be careful of the money. After her husband left she went into the bedroom to see that the money was all right, and to be sure that the gun was where she could get it real quick if she had occasion to use it. She found that every cartridge had been taken from the gun and she could not understand that as it was always loaded. She looked up some more shells and loaded the gun and went to bed and to sleep.

Some time in the night she was awakened by some one in the room. She reached under her pillow and got the gun and asked "Who's there?" The man did not answer but kept on walking toward the bed. She fired point blank at him and he fell. She waited a few minutes and got up and lit a lamp and found that she had killed her own husband. Then she realized why the gun had been unloaded. Everybody decided that the man had decided

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to get the money himself. My father sat on the Coroner's jury who held the inquest for the dead man. I was about twelve years old when this happened but I have never forgotten it.

We left Pecos Texas in February 1887, for Silver City New Mexico.

My Mother's father, A. F. Bell, and her mother and five brothers lived on a cattle ranch there. There were eight wagons in this immigrant train, some going to New Mexico and some to Arizona. Mr. Henderson, the man who had lost his family from smallpox, and his little four year old boy traveled with us in this train. He stopped at Lordsburg New Mexico. The trip from Pecos to El Paso Texas was an awfully hard one on us as my Mother felt so badly and it was such cold weather. We stopped in El Paso Texas for several days and camped where Washington 6 Park is now located. I saw my first adobe houses in El Paso and we ate our first frijole beans. The immigrant train split up at Lordsburg New Mexico, most of them going on into Arizona. My father was anxious to go to Arizona too but my mother was feeling so bad that she wanted to go to Silver City where her people were so that she could be near her mother. We stayed in Lordsburg until June and then started for Silver City by way of the Burro Mountains. We children were anxious to see the place where Geronimo had killed Judge Gomez and his wife and had taken their five year old son away with them. The soldiers from Fort Bayard New Mexico and the Scouts went after Geronimo and his band of Indians. They trailed them to the line of Old Mexico where they met a band of squaws who told the soldiers and scouts that the little boy's brains had been dashed out against a tree. Mr. Cravens, the man I afterwards married was one of the Scouts who trailed Geronimo then. Mr. Cravens ran a livery stable in Silver City at that time and Judge Gomez and his wife and small son were on their way to Lordsburg, in a buggy rented from Mr. Cravens, when they were attacked by Geronimo and his band of Indians. They shot one of the horses to stop the buggy and took the other horse away with them. After I was married to Mr. Cravens we were down in Mexico in 1902 and we were told that the Gomez boy had not been killed, that he was the chief of a band of Indians.

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After we got to Silver City the people there told us such horrible things about what the Indians did to the white people around there. I remember one of the stories they told was that the Indians had taken a little white girl and hanged her on a meat hook.

When we got to Silver City father took up a claim west of the town on the Gila river. We had some cattle and a small farm. Mother died in the fall of 1887. That was the first year of the Cattle Men's war in Grant County.

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I met Mr. Cravens in Silver City and we were married in 1898. We had no children. My father died in 1902. Mr. Cravens and I came to Lincoln County New Mexico in 1905. We bought a ranch at the foot of Nogal Peak, eight miles south east of Carrizozo, where we raised cattle and Mr. Cravens did some prospecting for gold. Mr. Cravens died in Carrizozo, New Mexico, May 1, 1936.

NARRATOR: Mrs. Florence Cravens. Carrizozo, N.M. Aged 63 years.